

San Pedro Bay Historical Society Newsletter

WINTER 2022

February

Annual Meeting & Election

The Society held its 2021 Annual Meeting November 13 at AltaSea, the research and innovation institute taking shape in the old warehouses along City Dock 1. Tim McOsker, then CEO of AltaSea, now its special advisor, spoke to us about the complex arrangements that have gone into creating the institute, the great challenges of funding, and plans for expansion. It was an interesting experience to hear the forward-looking ideas while sitting in the cavernous, century old industrial structure. During the meeting, the National Geographic *Venture* pulled up along the dock, presenting a chance to inspect the ship up close.

Many thanks to Tim McOsker for welcoming the Society to AltaSea and also Robin Aube, director of advancement, who arranged for equipment and set-up.

The election results returned to the board for 2022:

Mona Dallas Reddick - president

Linda Howat - vice president

Frank Anderson - secretary

Mary Jo Walker - chief financial officer

Directors at large re-elected: Gina Bellous, Donna Dragich, Andrea Luse, Toni Martinovich, John Mattson, Kara McLeod, Toni O'Donnell, Chuck Short, John Smith, and Ann Tompkins. Welcomed to the board were newly elected Krystyna Oakes and past president of SPBHS Joe McKinzie. Appreciation for their contributions is extended to board members who have stepped down, Amy Epperhart, Bob Bartlett, and Irene Almeida.

Also Last Fall

"The Muller House After Dark" proved a popular event. Mary O'Maley told of people's experiences of uncanny circumstances and ghostly sensations. Kara McLeod recounted Halloween customs and cleared up any confusion between the significance of Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations and Halloween. Kara, along with Gina Bellous and Toni Martinovich as the three witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* performed the "Double, double, toil and trouble" scene, with appropriate cackles over a faux cauldron into which they dropped an "eye of newt" and the other witchy ingredients on the menu. *Continued on page 2*

Launch of the New SPBHS Project



As previewed in the Spring 2021 newsletter, the SPBHS Landmarks Committee has been at work on a project to mark San Pedro's historical sites, commercial buildings, residences, homes of noteworthy people, and other structures. The concept: create an informative plaque evocative of our seaside setting to mark places of importance for the character and history of the town. Patti Kraakevik came forward to fund the artwork, and local graphic artist Helli Svensson produced the design. The Central San Pedro Neighborhood Council generously awarded a Neighborhood Purpose Grant of \$930, which covered the production and eventual installation of two plaques by Wellington Signs. A plaque based on the artwork shown above will be installed at the Deco Art Deco Building on 8th and Pacific, and a special event is planned for its debut in April. The plaques are made of a painted aluminum with raised lettering and will be available in 16- and 12-inch diameters.

We are excited about this project, feeling that it is the right time to bring greater attention to the local history embodied in the built fabric and sites of the town. Precise costs for the plaque and eligibility criteria are being finalized. To learn how you can support this project or obtain a plaque created for your location, please contact George Woytovich (servubiz@aol.com) or Mona Dallas Reddick (mdalred@gmail.com). There will soon be additional information on the SPBHS website.

Group Organizes for Mexican Hollywood

Local San Pedrans who have connections to Mexican Hollywood or memories of this harborside community have been meeting together for several years. Now, they have formally organized as a non-profit under the name Mexican Hollywood Culture Society. One of their first goals is to increase recognition of the neighborhood that once existed on the five acres roughly in the vicinity of the present Cruise Center on the Main Channel, next to Berths 90 and 91. It was the home of about 80 families of Mexican descent, who created a strong community amid economic hardships. Maggie de Alba has been selected as the president of the organization, Richard Gonzalez as vice president, and Isela Sujdovic as secretary.

An archaeological study done in 2008 for the Port of Los Angeles attributes the small wooden houses of Mexican Hollywood to the Pacific Coal Company, which either built the homes for its mostly Irish laborers or permitted them to construct their own houses. An interesting construction feature is that "grounded" boats served as foundations for some houses, and some were raised on stilts as a protective measure against the surges from the wakes of ships passing in the Main Channel.

The aerial photo below, which dates from about the mid-1930s, shows the cluster of wooden houses that made up Mexican Hollywood. The houses sit between Harbor Boulevard, the wider roadway that angles off to the left, and Ancon Street, the short straight street that bisects the cluster. C. J. Hendry's ship chandlery is the large building at the lower left, and the industrial complex at the top center is Todd Shipyard. Harbor Boulevard was carved out of the former Nob Hill. The 1892 Pierce map indicates that the site which became Mexican Hollywood was once elevated.



L to R: Toni Martinovich, Gina Bellous, and Kara McLeod invoke spells at the "Muller House Museum After Dark" event.

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In September, Steve Marconi spoke at the Muller House Museum for our first in-person program since the start of the pandemic. Steve shared his plans for a San Pedro war memorial on the waterfront to honor those who lost their lives in service during WW I, WW II, the Korean or Vietnam wars. Funding for this long-planned project has come from County Supervisor Janice Hahn and from grants awarded by Council District 15 and the Port.

Steve also updated us on his search to identify San Pedro's war dead and included the story of a young San Pedro man, Kenneth Frye. Frye and 73 others were lost at sea when their destroyer, *USS Frank E. Evans*, collided with the Australian aircraft carrier *HMAS Melbourne* while on a training exercise in the South China Sea during the Viet Nam War. Because the tragedy occurred outside the zone of combat, the names of these men were never inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, District of Columbia. Now, here in his hometown, Frye will be remembered on the San Pedro War Memorial.

To accompany Steve's talk, Kara McLeod prepared a display of military uniforms along with artifacts relating to WW II. The Archives contributed special sections of the *News-Pilot* that featured photos of several hundred San Pedrans in service during WW II.

Writing, photos, and production: Mona Dallas Reddick, with thanks to Adriana R. for p. 2, col. 1 photo and to Krystyna Oakes for assistance with p. 4 photo.

Thanks to the mailing team: Mary Jo Walker, John Mattson & Archives volunteers.

Email us at sanpedrohistory@gmail.com
Visit our website at sanpedrobayhistoricalsociety.com

Other News from the Muller House Museum



Just as the December holidays were taking off, several of us gathered along the Harbor Boulevard slope of the Muller House to tackle a carpet of giant ice plant (genus *Carpobrotus*) overgrowing the sidewalk. Some cuttings were transplanted to eroding, gopher-riddled slope areas. What a job! *Carpobrotus* is invasive and requires muscle to wrestle its long

strands from the soil. One day, it is hoped, a more appropriate native ground or slope cover can be planted, but for now the ice plant serves as a fire retardant along a stretch where there has been vandalism.



Helping with this effort were Joe McKinzie (top) Donna Dragich (far left), John Smith (center), Lois Tregarthen (right). Not pictured are Bob Reddick, Linda Howat, Mona Dallas Reddick, and Eddy Bay. If you would like to help with other gardening tasks, please contact John Smith or Mona by sending a message to sanpedrohistory@gmail.com.

Welcome to New Members

Linda Alexander	Robert Muthamia
Marylynn Amiot	Julie Mercer
A. C. W. Bethel	Jack Molisani
Vince LaFarga	Stefan Sekula
Susan Lance	
Degree of Pocahontas, Carrie Council # 306	

Members Lost in 2021

John Ara
Betty Jacobelly
Audrian Mihaljevich
Mary Samaras
Eve Thomson
Hjordis Joy Weston

Some will remember that John Ara was involved with the restoration of the Muller House in the late 1980s. Betty Jacobelly, ILWU retired, and Joy Weston, a former SPBHS board member, volunteered in the gift shop.

Walker's Café

Local resident Emma Rault launched an effort to prevent the loss of the now closed Walker's by nominating the café for a historic-cultural monument designation. These nominations are submitted to the city's Office of Historic Resources/ Cultural Heritage Commission. A hearing was held January 20, and the L.A. Conservancy, SPBHS, the Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council, City Council District 15, and community members all expressed strong support. The Cultural Heritage Commission voted to consider the nomination, a first step in a longer process to obtain monument status. At the hearing, the owner's son stated that the owner and his family had no intention of reopening the café. A historic-cultural monument designation gives the commission power to delay any proposed demolition for 180 days, with the possibility of a subsequent 180-day extension so that means for preservation can be explored.

Archives News

Donations to the Archives of photos and artifacts are a valuable means of preserving and interpreting the town's history. Among items recently received were documents and memorabilia donated by Stephanie Mardesich, much of it relating to the civic endeavors of her parents, Lee and Joseph Mardesich. Anna Pehousek donated photos of the artist Beatrice Hess, some of her sketches and personal items. Hess, originally from Czechoslovakia, created many of the exhibits in the old marine museum located in the Cabrillo Beach Bathhouse. At a future date, these photos and sketches will be exhibited at the Muller House Museum.



From the December 11 holiday party at the MHM, L to R: kilted Jim Howat, Linda Howat, Rod Oakes, Krystyna Oakes, and Alvin Jacobson.

Looking Ahead

Planning is made uncertain by Covid, but we roughed out a schedule of presentations and events for 2022.

Tentative plans for March through July are listed below. Please watch for email announcements adding or confirming dates and times. The SPBHS website and Facebook page will also provide the latest information.

Happy Birthday San Pedro! Sunday, March 6

An informal celebration of San Pedro's birthday, now the 134th since its incorporation as a town. Yes, we acknowledge the consolidation with Los Angeles in 1909, but it's the 1888 incorporation that gets the cake, or more likely the cupcakes. There will be a historical display in the Library and refreshments served on the Muller House Museum patio, rain and virus permitting. Time: 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Unveiling of Plaques at Deco Art Deco (the old Montgomery Ward's) at 8th & Pacific, April

Navy Tea on the Muller House Patio, May 21

Enjoy a variety of curated fine teas from Upton's along with savouries and sweets.

Yard Sale at the Muller House, June

Donations for the sale are welcomed on the first and second Sundays of the month, between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m. at the Muller House Museum. For more information, please email sanpedrohistory@gmail.com

A Pre-Independence Day Event–Ice Cream Social, July 3

Recent Additions at the Muller House

A wonderful piece of furniture, an armoire, has been donated to the Society by Bill and Fran Muller of San Pedro. Bill is the great-grandson of the pioneer shipbuilder William A. Muller, whose family home became our museum. The armoire was constructed by Mr. Muller himself! Trained as a ship's carpenter, he was expert in woodworking and used the same African gumwood for this piece which is also found in his other carpentry at the Muller House, such as the two mantels, wainscoting, and built-in bookcases. The armoire has a fine checkerboard inlay on the doors and sides, pull-out drawers for folded garments, and an ingenious lean-out set of suit hangers—all of solid wood construction. Plan on stopping by to see it. We are grateful to Bill and Fran for donating this family treasure. Thanks also go to members Bob Bartlett,

John Smith, Frank Anderson, and Bob Reddick for wrangling this heavy piece into the small space once used as Mrs. Muller's sewing room, where it fits beautifully.

A second addition comes from the Los Angeles Maritime Museum—a pair of handsome, glass-door bookcases that belonged to Bill Olesen, an early member of the Society, local historian, writer, and boat builder. These are sizable bookcases, and our tentative plans are to arrange them in the workroom, which is attached to the garage. They will provide needed storage and also be on view.



Enjoy history, old houses, antiques, and local lore?

Consider joining the docents and other volunteers at the Muller House Museum. There are opportunities on the regular first two Sundays of the month when the house is open to visitors and projects both large and small the rest of the time, for which your help would be welcome. To contact us, please email sanpedrohistory@gmail.com

